



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

**About the Book of the Month:** This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

## Firebird

Misty Copeland (Author), Christopher Myers (Illustrator)

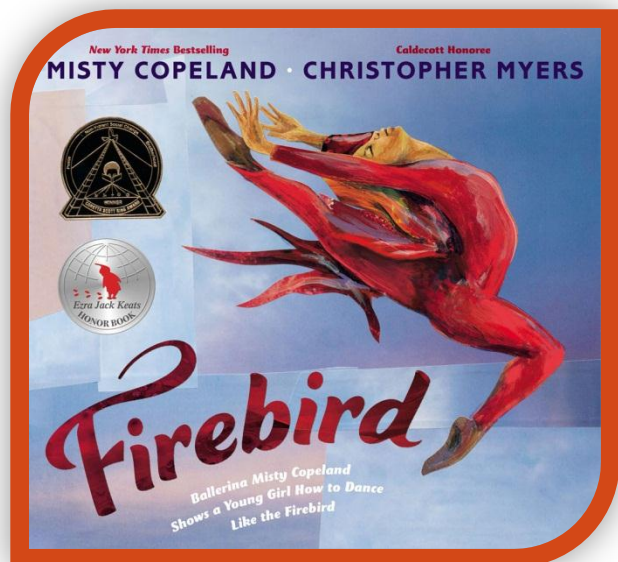
In her debut picture book, Misty Copeland tells the story of a young girl whose confidence is fragile and who is questioning her own ability to reach the heights that Misty has reached. Misty encourages this young girl's faith in herself and shows her exactly how, through hard work and dedication, she too can become Firebird.

ISBN: 978-0399166150

Publisher: G.P. Putnam's Sons

Year Published: 2014

Age Range: 5–8



## Book Themes

Role models, Identity, Stereotypes, Affirmation

## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind children of their meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. See also ADL's [Definitions Related to Bias, Injustice and Bullying for Elementary Age Children](#).

- applause
- arabesque
- barre
- beginning
- dreaming
- horizon
- pas de deux
- pirouetting

- skyline
- spotlight
- stereotype
- swift

### Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask pre-reading questions:

- What is the title of the book?
- Who and what do you see on the cover of the book?
- What do you think the book might be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout the reading to check comprehension and keep the students engaged:

- Who are the two dancers in the picture? (page 5)
- Why are the dancers' slippers worn out? (page 16)
- Why are the children looking up to the dancer? (page 28)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- In what ways does the younger dancer look up to and admire the older dancer?
- Does the younger dancer think she can ever be a dancer like the one she looks up to? How do you know?
- What does the younger dancer mean when she says she feels "gray as rain" and "heavy as naptime?" Why do you think she feels that way?
- What does the older dancer say to the younger dancer and how do you think it makes her feel?
- What did you learn about how the older dancer felt when she was younger and trying to be a professional ballerina?
- How does the younger ballerina feel when she is dancing at the end? How can you tell?
- Why do they both look similar at the end?
- In what ways do the images and pictures tell a story in the book?
- What do you think was the message of the book?
- Why do you think Misty Copeland wrote this book?

### Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

#### 1. Learn More about Misty Copeland

Read aloud the last page of the book on page 33, which is a letter from the author of the book, Misty Copeland. Ask: *Who is Misty Copeland? How did she feel as a young girl growing up? What was her dream? Why didn't she see herself in the ballet books she read? What are her hopes for*

*young black and brown ballet dancers?* Explain that Misty Copeland is a thirty-four year old ballerina. In 2015, she became the first African American performer to be appointed as a Principal Dancer for the American Ballet Theater. Misty Copeland has written two autobiographical books; one for adults called *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina* and this award-winning children's picture book, *Firebird*. In April 2015, Copeland was named one of the "100 Most Influential People in the World" by Time magazine and a documentary film about her life called *A Ballerina's Tale* was released in October 2015. Misty Copeland has talked publicly about the harmful influence of the stereotypes about being a ballerina and also how being the first African American Principal Dancer makes her an important role model for children of color. Project or print [the Memphis Collage Dance Collective Photo](#) that recently went viral on Instagram and discuss the importance of people being able to see themselves in media images. You can share some of these [photos](#) of Misty Copeland and learn more about her life by looking at her [website](#) or [biography](#) website. As a culminating project, have students learn more about Misty Copeland and have them undertake one of the following projects to share what they learned: a poem, essay or letter about her; a presentation, a drawing or sculpture of her; a statement or PSA about the importance of role models.

## 2. Imaging and Draw/Write the Next Few Pages of the Book

Remind students about how the book ended by re-reading pages 28–32. Ask students: *What happens at the end of the book?* Remind students that at the end of the book, the older dancer tells the younger dancer that someday she will have younger dancers look up and admire her and that she will be a role model to those younger dancers. Ask students: *What do you think might happen next in the story? Do you think the dancer who looks up to Misty Copeland will be someone that other young dancers admire and look up to? What do you think her journey looks like to get there?* Have students imagine what might happen if the book continued for a few more pages. Instruct them to take their ideas and write and draw the next scene or two as they imagine it, using the style of the illustrator as much as possible. When completed, students can share their pages of the book with the rest of the class by posting them on the wall and doing a gallery walk. You can also invite parents/family members in for a whole class reading of the book and include the students' additional pages.

## 3. Metaphors and Similes

Ask students if they know what similes and metaphors are; if you have already covered them in your curriculum, review the definitions and provide examples. Explain that a **simile** is when you make a comparison between two things and use the word "as" or "like" to compare them. An example is "Angela runs like the wind" to show that Angela runs fast. A **metaphor** is similar in that it compares two things but it doesn't use the words "as" or "like;" it just says that one thing is the other thing. An example is: "Life is a rollercoaster" to show that while life is not literally a rollercoaster, it can be compared to one because it has ups and downs like a rollercoaster does. It sounds more descriptive to say that it is like a rollercoaster rather than saying it has highs and lows.

Re-read the book and ask students to point out some of the similes and metaphors used such as:

- Space between you and me is longer than forever (page 2)
- You are the sky and clouds and air (page 4)
- Your feet are swift as sunlight (page 4)
- I'm gray as rain, heavy as naptime, low as a storm pressing on rooftops (page 6)

- A dreaming shooting star of a girl (page 14)
- Even birds must learn to fly (page 17)
- You will soar, become a swan (page 20)
- As we spin across the planets (page 24)

After identifying metaphors and similes throughout the book, brainstorm a list of their own examples and record them on the board. Then distribute post-it notes and have students write more metaphors and similes, posting them on the board as well. Have students then use some of the similes and metaphors to write poems.

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on identity, stereotypes and role models.

### Curriculum Resources

10 Ideas for Teaching Black History Month," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history.html).

Dolls are Us," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/dolls-are-us.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/dolls-are-us.html).

Mo'Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/mone-davis-and-gender-stereotypes.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/mone-davis-and-gender-stereotypes.html).

Role Models and Stereotypes: Misty Copland's Story," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/role-models-and-stereotypes.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/role-models-and-stereotypes.html).

Who Am I? Identity Poems," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html).

### Websites

Anti-Bias Education

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education)

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Black History Month

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/black-history-month.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/black-history-month.html)

Provides PreK-12 curriculum and other resources to bring the themes of Black History Month to your classroom during February and throughout the year.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment.html)

Tips for the classroom educator to create an anti-bias learning environment.

The Question Corner

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood/c/the-question-corner.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood/c/the-question-corner.html)

A collection of answers to frequently asked questions about anti-bias issues faced by early childhood professionals and family members interested in promoting respect for diversity among young children.

### Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

People, Identity and Culture: Black, African American and Caribbean American People,  
[www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=black-african-american-caribbean](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=black-african-american-caribbean)

Race and Racism, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/race-racism.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/race-racism.html)

## Memphis Collage Dance Collective Photo



Photo by Andrew J. Breig